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[SEP - 7, 1995]

From: <smurd@roanoke.infi.net>
 To: A16.A16(kidstv)
 Date: 9/6/95 10:35pm
 Subject: Debate on the Children's Television Act

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

We understand you are soliciting comments on children's television, and would like to stick our oar in. For the record: "we" are: white; mid-thirties in age; married for eleven years, no ex-spouses for either partner; both coming from families with biological parents still married to their original spouses; college-educated; parents of one three-year-old girl; use computers at home and in the workplace; Catholic; nonpartisan; living in a very rural corner of western Virginia (with crappy broadcast reception, thanks to the otherwise lovely Blue Ridge Mountains).

In our opinion, the private sector has largely dropped the ball when it comes to children's television. There is good commercial children's programming but it's clearly an emerging market (by which we mean, it might improve).

The three major networks and the most widely-watched cable networks (i.e., Nickelodeon) -- and by extension, Hollywood -- are:

-- overly commercial. Many Americans, ourselves included, find the marketing aimed at children to be overwhelming and offensive for many reasons, religious ones as well as aesthetic, severely detracting from what might be an otherwise fine program. Case in point: our three-year-old loves "Bill Nye the Science Guy", but we'd rather she see it on the local PBS affiliate than on the NBC affiliate that also carries it.

-- cartoons are not what they were when we grew up; they were made by adults for adults, as art and entertainment. Such is not the case now: they seem to be made by studios to sell products. One is reminded of Don Kershner and "The Monkees", a program brought into being solely to make money.

-- convey a shockingly narrow view of life through the distorted lens of modern consumer culture. We've heard the whine that kids can't be forced to watch educational television, but very small children aren't so jaded. The frequent theme seems to be that people from all cultures can be happy consumers; uh, that's not really what we had in mind in learning about other cultures. Contrast this with "Sesame Street"'s vignettes of extra-urban America: it's a much bigger place than Hollywood thinks, but one would never know that watching TV.

-- Yes, commercial cable networks, such as The Learning Channel, do a bang-up job of showing children's programs in the morning hours, even without commercials. We love it. Just one thing: the content is almost exclusively from the UK, Canada, and Australia, and THAT'S public funded! It would be a weird twist to choke down on funding of American public sector children's programming on the basis on commercial cable networks airing other countries' public TV content!

We hear a lot these days about Adam Smith's supposed invisible hand; in the same breath (and, strangely, from the same people), we also hear a lot about a lack of morals. If it's a reality, then it's bad enough that it's stirring up people's economic lives. It is certainly no guide to children's programming choices. Children's lives need to be protected and nurtured, not bought and sold as a commodity.

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 List A B C D E

From: The Lone Warrior <tabrock@postoffice.ptd.net>
To: A16.A16(kidstv)
Date: 9/7/95 12:47am
Subject: Barney vs. Sesame Street: A Comparison (originally by Aimee Yermish, used with Permission)

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=====_810460510==_
 Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Please read the attached file. It states my position better than I ever could.

=====_810460510==_
 Content-Type: application/mac-binhex40; name="YERMISH.TXT"
 Content-Disposition: attachment; filename="YERMISH.TXT"

=====_810460510==_
 Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"

Arsenal the Lone Warrior

```

+-----+-----+
| Each night I go to bed      | Commander-In-Chief, Blood Jihad |
| I pray the Lord my Soul to Keep | Director, Covert Ops team |
| No I ain't looking for forgiveness | Commodore, NEBULA |
| But before I'm six foot deep | The Black Knight of the 20th and |
| Lord, I gotta ask a favor | 23rd Centuries |
| And I hope You understand | +-----+ |
| 'Cause I lived Life to fullest | "Don't get me angry. You |
| Let this Boy Die like a Man | wouldn't like me when I'm angry." |
| Staring down a bullet | - Bill Bixby |
| Let me make my Final Stand - JBJ | "GRRRARR!!!!" - Lou Ferrigno |
+-----+-----+
  
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MM 93-48

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From: Neon Wizard <renk0006@Gold.TC.UMN.Edu>
To: A16.A16(kidstv)
Date: 9/7/95 1:18am
Subject: Comments

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This message is in MIME format. The first part should be readable text, while the remaining parts are likely unreadable without MIME-aware tools.

-----_810460838==_
Content-Type: TEXT/PLAIN; CHARSET=us-ascii

I am an eleven-year-old, and read your note about the proposed "rules" for kids TV. I think that this is a very good idea and that you should consider the actual influence of certain shows, not just their appearance, and analyze every aspect of each show.

I have enclosed an essay in this e-mail with information about a specific television show that I have strongly disliked ever since it was released.

Thanks for your time.

James Renken - JPR@ACM.CS.UMN.Edu (preferred) Renk0006@Gold.TC.UMN.Edu
Renk0006@ITLabs.UMN.Edu JPR@FreeNet.MSP.MN.US

"Barney & Friends" vs. "Sesame Street": A Comparison
By Aimee Yermish
~~~~~

I knew something was odd when I heard two little children behind me in the supermarket singing the "I love you" song, together, in unison, in this dreamy little tempo, no life, without being prompted by an adult.

I also knew something was wrong when one of my friends, who has two Barney-aged children (3 and 5 -- Hi, Lin!) started complaining about the show. Gee, I always liked children's television, and I'd never seen those kind of reactions. That's strange. But hey, I didn't want to pass judgement on something I had never seen.

Well, I've got the flu, and there are two public TV stations near me, which means I have been able to watch two episodes of Barney a day. I watched Sesame Street also, for comparison, and also to help get the bad taste out of my mouth. Mister Rogers didn't seem to be on (which is a real pity), so comments on that are based on somewhat more distant memory (but I have watched it plenty of times since I was six).

I'm not a psychologist, but I'm also not stupid. Barney is \*not\* innocent, wholesome, good-for-rug-rats fun. It models "good" behavior, but only if you define "good" in a certain way. The main subtext of the show appears to be that all negative emotions should simply be denied so that we can all be happy, and that we should all conform to the group and accept the leadership of other people instead of using our own ideas. If I had children, I would forbid them to watch it, just like I would forbid them to watch pornography. The values it teaches are \*not\* the ones I would want my children to learn.

The children in Barney never admit to a single bit of jealousy, rivalry, anger, tension, fear, or any other bad feeling. Well, that's not true, precisely. On \*extremely\* rare occasions, they do say things like, "I want to go next," "No, I want to go next," "Let's go together!" All with a stupid grin on their faces that shows that there was never any real argument. The situations can \*always\* be solved immediately, care-bear style, so there is never any real tension.

The problem is that even stupid childless people like me know that children's real lives, even at age three (\*especially\* at age three!) aren't like that. Learning to share and take turns and such is not so easy, and there are usually plenty of tantrums and fights on the outside, and plenty of upset feelings on the inside. For instance, one of the Sesame Street episodes I watched recently had a situation where Cookie Monster was playing with a friend, and they went to get a snack, and there was only one cookie left. Of course, Cookie Monster wanted to eat it, but then he saw that he would hurt his friend's feelings. So he went through a song (which, by the way, is much more musically interesting and educational than the ones on Barney) where he weighed all the fun he had with his friend

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against the momentary pleasure of a cookie, and decided that he would rather give the cookie to his friend. On Barney, even if the situation came up (which it clearly wouldn't, because there are \*always\* enough treats to go around), they would have just smiled and immediately broken the cookie in half. Well, from Cookie Monster, they learn that those feelings of selfishness are perfectly normal (why do you think so many of the muppets are "monsters"? Children are very afraid of their "bad" emotions), that even if there isn't a simple solution, that by weighing the various sides of an issues, they can decide what is truly important to them. From Barney, they learn that good children don't have bad feelings and that all problems have easy solutions which don't involve giving up anything important. Mister Rogers doesn't show kids interacting with each other that much, but his make-believe and his songs send the message that you are a good person even when you have bad emotions, and that intelligence can be applied to difficult problems to find good solutions. Barney says that you are only a good person when you have good emotions, and that problems don't exist -- a very bad message to send.

Another disturbing facet to the show is the leadership role Barney takes. The children ask him what they should do to have fun, and he tells them. They ask him what they should do when they're not sure what to do, and he tells them. They paint the pictures, and instead of asking them to use their picture to add to the growing story, he takes over and tells them what their pictures mean, decides on the title and cover and doesn't even put their names on it. They can't have fun until he's there, and they can't have fun until he tells them how to do it. They don't make believe without his telling them what to imagine. Their own ideas are subjugated to those of the leader, who doesn't even ask for input. This is not a good model of creative play, nor is it a good model of teamwork or of leadership. In Sesame

Street, by contrast, the adults are viewed as resources, but the children drive the action. Every episode has a running plot where a few monsters have a problem to solve (Zoe's aunt tickles her, the fish called Wanda doesn't want Wolfgang the seal to eat her, Big Bird and

Rosita want to learn enough about babies to play family with Elmo, etc), and they come up with and try a variety of solutions to each problem, with varying degrees of success (Zoe tries wearing a tiger suit to scare her aunt, but the aunt isn't scared. She thinks about staying away from her aunt, but realizes that she would have to give up spending time with her, which she very much enjoys. She carries a pineapple around so that the spiny leaves protect her chin, which works, but she gets tired after carrying it all day). The adults don't muscle in to the action, but offer advice or other help (at one point, Gina is practically wrestling with Wolfgang to give Wanda and Big Bird time to implement the successful idea they came up with on their own) if asked. The adults' ideas are generally good, but they don't force them on the monsters. Instead, the monsters model good information-gathering and decision-making skills.

Another thing which is disturbing about Barney is the choreography.

These kids always do everything in unison. They dance to exactly the same steps, and do not a half bad job at it. They mimic what they are shown exactly. In the episode on individuality, they did a song and dance about how boring it would be if they were all identical robots, and the sick thing was that it was basically the same as when they were kids. In Sesame Street, kids get the same body awareness practice through dance, but the instructions are much vaguer and the kids are each doing their own thing. The subtext in Barney is that it's good to do everything identically with everyone else; the subtext in Sesame Street is that you can have fun with other people while each doing things differently, that in the world of fun, there are very few "wrong" answers.

In the Barney episode about individuality, each child named something that they liked doing, on the grounds that liking something different from other people was why you were special. But then, Barney made them all do those things together. That's counterproductive -- it shows children that something gains its definition of good if everyone else likes doing it too, not if \*you\* like doing it. On Sesame

Street, Ernie and Bert demonstrate very well how you can like other people without having to like all the same things (one of the shows I watched had an episode where they treated exactly that issue, we like different things and we love each other).

In line with the idea that the children are taught to deny their basic differences, somehow all these kids on Barney, whose ages I estimate at 8 - 16 (or maybe older, Lucy is pretty big), not to mention the grownups who show up on some episodes, pretend that they are all the same ages as the kids watching the show (2 - 5?). All people, regardless of age, react to Barney and the proposed activities in the same way -- that is, at the developmental level of a toddler. But the viewing kids aren't stupid. They know those kids are older than they are. And the real older kids (and grownups) they deal with don't react to things at toddler level. Real adults may get annoyed at noisy or messy play or constant singing of the same song. A toddler seeing the modeled behavior of older kids and adults on Barney would be very disturbed to find that his parents and siblings don't act like Barney says they're supposed to. Are my parents bad parents because they don't play the way Barney says they

do? Am I a bad person because my parents get angry at me sometimes? On Sesame Street, by contrast, the characters react realistically to each other, while still maintaining the safety net that just because you do something that annoys someone doesn't mean that you or they are bad people.

Tully and Rosita wander around one episode playing with a pair of cymbals, and Luis (a grownup human) makes no secret of the fact that he finds it too loud and wishes they would make all that noise somewhere else.

There were lots of other things I found disturbing on Barney, but these are the major points so far. Remember, nothing is a no-option when a kid is watching -- they learn from everything they see. And I'd rather not have any kids I've got responsibility for learn from that show. It's false in a very dangerous way.

Okay, so I do have a soft spot for Sesame Street, I was born in 1968 and grew up with it. But I really did my best to try to give Barney a chance, to view it in the most positive light I could, and I couldn't find anything worth keeping.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF SECRETARY

Commissioner Susan Ness  
Federal Communications Commission  
1919 M St., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

August 28, 1995

DOCKET FILE COPY ORIGINAL

Re: MM Docket No. 93-48

Dear Commissioner Ness:

The Cedar Rapids Television Company, licensee of KCRG-TV and KCRG-AM, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, offers the following comments regarding MM Docket No. 93-48.

The Commission is now considering new, stricter rules implementing the Children's Television Act, including the possibility of numerical "quotas" requiring broadcasters to devote minimum amounts of time to educational and informational children's programming.

We are opposed to more and stricter regulations for the following reasons:

**1. The amount of children's educational programming has increased.**

As a local broadcaster we have significantly increased the amount of children's educational and informational programming in response to the Children's Television Act. Furthermore, we devote **prime time** in addition to other time periods to this type of programming, to assure that the largest possible audience can see it. Yet we get no more credit for prime time programming than programming broadcast to much smaller audiences in other time periods.

We continue to produce significant amounts of local and national children's programming. As a licensee for the Cedar Rapids-Waterloo-Dubuque market, we've determined what's best for our community's children in consultation with local community leaders. Establishing national quotas and definitions administered by Washington imposes a national censor's ideas about what's educational upon the people of our community.

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2. **Establishment of government-mandated quotas may force our station to curtail local news programming.**

We produce six (6) major newscasts every day, Monday through Friday.

### **Monday-Friday Local News Programming**

| <b>Program</b>          | <b>Time Period</b>  | <b>Length</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| TV 9 Early Morning News | 5:30 to 6:00 a.m.   | 30 minutes    |
| TV 9 Morning News       | 6:00 to 7:00 a.m.   | 60 minutes    |
| TV 9 11:30 News         | 11:30 to 12:00 p.m. | 30 minutes    |
| Live at Five            | 5:00 to 5:30 p.m.   | 30 minutes    |
| TV 9 News at Six        | 6:00 to 6:30 p.m.   | 30 minutes    |
| TV 9 Nightcast          | 10:00 to 10:35 p.m. | 35 minutes    |

On Saturday we produce three major newscasts including three hours of morning news:

### **Saturday Local News Programming**

| <b>Program</b>      | <b>Time Period</b>  | <b>Length</b> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| TV 9 Sat. A.M. News | 6:00 to 9:00 a.m.   | 3 hours       |
| TV 9 Sat. 5:30 News | 5:30 to 6:00 p.m.   | 30 minutes    |
| TV 9 Sat. Nightcast | 10:00 to 10:35 p.m. | 35 minutes    |

On Sunday we produce three major newscasts including two hours of morning news.

### **Sunday Local News Programming**

| <b>Program</b>      | <b>Time Period</b>  | <b>Length</b> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| TV 9 Sun. A.M. News | 6:00 to 8:00 a.m.   | 2 hours       |
| TV 9 Sun. 5:30 News | 5:30 to 6:00 p.m.   | 30 minutes    |
| TV 9 Sun Nightcast  | 10:00 to 10:35 p.m. | 35 minutes    |

Significantly, a great deal of our local news is broadcast on weekend mornings, which are time periods usually scheduled with programs for children. If the Commission imposes numerical quotas upon us, we may be forced by government edict to replace our local news with children's programming to comply with those quotas. Thus, the Commission will have substituted its judgment for ours.

**3. Quotas are unnecessary.**

Broadcasters are responding to the Act and the unquantified obligation the Act imposes for more and better educational programming for children. Quotas set the maximum...as well as the minimum.

The National Association of Broadcasters recently filed a study with the Commission which shows that the amount of time broadcasters devote to informational and educational children's programming has increased more than 100% since passage of the Children's Programming Act.

**4. Quotas and government definitions of what is "educational" or "informational" children's programming may be Unconstitutional.**

The establishment of programming type-specific quotas and imposition of the Commission's definition of what is and is not educational programming may violate the Free Speech provisions of the U.S. Constitution.

Broadcasters understand the current definition of "educational and informational children's programming. No changes are needed.

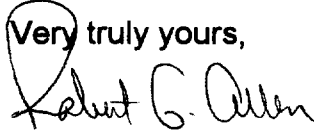
**5. Broadcasters should get credit for short-segment programming.**

Presently our station gets no credit for educational and informational segments which are less than five minutes in length. Yet, given the attention span of children and the hundreds of viewing choices available to children in today's electronic universe, short segments may be one of the most successful ways to deliver educational or informational material to children.

Licensees are discouraged from using these short segments because the Commission gives them no credit for broadcasting them.

In short, we feel that national programming quotas and national definitions of what constitutes "informational and educational children's programming" are unnecessary, burdensome, and Unconstitutional. We urge the Commission not to expand the rules, despite pressure from pressure groups who would like to substitute their judgment for the judgment of the broadcast licensees of this nation.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert G. Allen". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the phrase "Very truly yours,".

Robert G. Allen  
Vice President and General Manager